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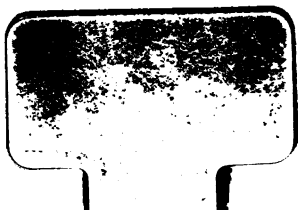
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THE
DUTY AND THE LIBERTY
OF A
CHRISTIAN CHURCH, &c.

BY THE
REV. ANDREW GRAY, A.M.,
PERTH.

Price 9d.

43. 321.





THE
DUTY AND THE LIBERTY
OF A
CHRISTIAN CHURCH,

ASSERTED AGAINST
POPERY, PUSEYISM, AND ERASTIANISM.

BY THE
REV. ANDREW GRAY, A.M.,
PERTH.

EDINBURGH :
JOHN JOHNSTONE, HUNTER SQUARE.
LONDON : R. GROOMBRIDGE.

MDCCCXLIII.

ENTERED IN STATIONERS' HALL.



Edinburgh: Printed by JOHN JOHNSTONE, High Street.

PREFATORY NOTE.

THE following little treatise was, in substance, delivered before the Synod of Perth and Stirling; and it is now, in a form somewhat extended, published at their request. The author feels that it is a mere sketch; but still it may be useful, as furnishing some materials of thought on a great subject, which is daily rising more and more on the notice of Christendom. A brief view of the bearings of a momentous question may be of advantage to prepare the way for the deeper consideration of the arguments by which its merits are conclusively determined and settled.

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THE DUTY AND THE LIBERTY OF A CHRISTIAN CHURCH.

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"My sheep hear my voice."—JOHN x. 27.  
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Two leading ideas offer themselves in these words. One is that of a relation subsisting between Christ and his people; the other is that of intercourse and communion which he and they have together.

However varied the language which is employed to express the relation which Christ's people bear to him, it is always such as to denote intimacy and closeness. They are his spouse, his members, his sheep. When it is said they are his sheep, the meaning is, not merely that they are the sheep of which he is the proprietor, but also that they are the sheep of which he is the watchful, the devoted, the self-sacrificing Shepherd.

Upon the relation between Christ and his people their mutual intercourse is founded. Because there is a relation, therefore there is an intercourse. Moreover, the nature of the former determines the nature of the latter. If the relation were distant and loose, the intercourse might be rare and circuitous; but as the relation is close and endearing, so the intercourse is constant and direct.

Even in Old Testament times, the intercourse was

immediate; and therefore we read of patriarchs who walked with God. It was immediate—without any go-between—in the days of Christ's flesh, when his disciples enjoyed his bodily presence. It is still immediate, now that Christ is in heaven. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," he says, "there am I in the midst of them." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." There is no mediator between Christ and believers. The correspondence which he and they have with each other, is not carried on by means of any third party; through his Word and Spirit, he and they are brought together, and maintain their mutual communications. To say all in a word, respecting the closeness of the intercourse of Christ with his people, there is *perfect union* between him and them. He and they are *one*. How intimate, then, must the fellowship be!

It is a direct intercourse that the text declares. "My sheep hear *my* voice"—not the voice of my apostles, of my ministers, but "*my* voice." The same thing is insisted on in the context, when the shepherd is described as calling his own sheep by name, and leading them out, and when it is said of the sheep, that "a stranger will they not follow, but will flee from him; for they know not the voice of strangers;" and also when our Lord exclaims, "I am the good Shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine." Paul, too, expresses it when he says, "Let *the word of Christ* dwell in you richly in all wisdom,"—"the word of Christ," not the word of any servant, however gifted or faithful, but the word of our Master and Lord himself.

The affirmation of the text, "My sheep hear my voice," is to be considered as applicable to Christians *individually*. Every believer has personal communion with Christ of the most intimate kind. In particular, he

hears, feels the power of, and cordially obeys the voice of Christ. It was that voice which first awoke him from the sleep of unconcern about his soul, and which went, with quickening efficacy, to his heart, as he lay dead in trespasses and sins. To it he now listens eagerly. The words it utters are his law. It gives him peace, comfort, confidence, direction.

And who will say that our text does not apply to Christians when taken *collectively*? If every sheep of Christ hears the Shepherd's voice, every *flock* into which the sheep are gathered, must hear it too. The family, the congregation, the Church, are pointed at, no less than individual believers, when our Lord declares, "My sheep hear my voice." Christ's people, in the various spiritual communities into which his providence and laws have organized them, have no leader, no chief but himself, no rule but the word of his mouth. Every meeting of his disciples, every council of his servants, every Church on which his Spirit rests, falls within the scope of our text; and it is both the duty and the privilege of them all to hear Christ's voice.

We thus come to the subject to which it is our design, at present, to call special attention. We think that, in regard to that intercourse between Christ and his people, which the text announces, the doctrine of a certain duty, and a certain privilege or liberty, as respects believers, is here distinctly taught. The duty is that of hearing Christ's voice; and the liberty or privilege is that of hearing Christ's voice. One and the same thing is both the duty and the liberty. It is a duty, for Christians are bound to do it. It is a liberty, for Christians love to do it, and it is a wrong and a sin to try to prevent them. We wish to speak, then, of this duty and liberty as concerns the Churches of Christ.

I. Of the duty of a Christian Church.

There are three points here which require consideration—the nature of the duty, the ground of it, and its extent.

1. The nature of the duty. The duty consists in hearing Christ's voice. It implies, of course, obedience to Christ's will. Every Church is bound to have careful and supreme regard to the Redeemer's commandments, and to act accordingly. Every Church is bound to listen to the doctrines of the Saviour, and to believe accordingly. Every Church is bound to know the declared mind of Christ in all matters of faith and practice, and to be wholly conformed to it. By the mind of Christ, so far as it is delivered to the Church, or can be ascertained, and whatever the subjects to which it relates may be, every Church of Christ is bound to walk.

It is the duty of a Church to hear and obey Christ's voice as it comes from the Scriptures. The Scriptures have been given to the Churches for this end. Through them alone does Christ now speak. They contain, they constitute, His "living" Word. It is no mere report of what He said of old that we find in them. By means of these living oracles, and the promised grace of the Spirit on the docile and reverent study of them, we are brought as close to the mind and will of Christ as we should be, if His bodily presence were vouchsafed us. The duty of hearing Christ's voice, then, brings a Church at once to the Bible. There are other books which discourse usefully concerning the things that voice has uttered, and which are therefore worthy to be prized. There are books in which Christ's sayings, as understood by their authors, are reported and well enlarged upon. But the study of all such books is not the duty now before us. A Church does not hear the voice of Christ till it comes to the Word of Inspiration.

We assert all this of the visible communities of which the catholic visible Church is composed. We say it not merely of the individual members belonging to these, but of the bodies themselves in their corporate capacity. It is of their belief and their conduct, as religious societies, that we affirm it to be their duty to take the mind of Christ as their paramount rule.

We anticipate no objection among Protestants to the view which has been stated. However inconsistent with it the opinions of many may be, and we think them to be very inconsistent indeed, the duty of a Church, as we have now described it, will probably meet with general assent. At the same time it is proper to advert to the ground on which the duty rests.

2. This is our second point. Whence arises the duty incumbent on every Church? It arises out of the very idea of a Church. Let any man try to conceive of a Church that is *not* bound to obey Christ. We bid him not conceive of a Church that is remiss in doing so—of a Church that is chargeable with breaches of the duty. That he may accomplish. But let a man imagine in his own mind a Church in which Christ has no *right* to reign, and on which no obligation lies to embrace Christ's doctrines, and to do Christ's will; and what will he find? Will he find that it is the conception of what can, without an outrage upon language, be called a Church, that he has formed? No. He will find that he has excluded from his conception an element which is absolutely indispensable to make it the idea of a Church at all. The idea of a society of human beings he will have; but not of that particular kind of society to which Scripture gives the name of a Church. We may say, in short, that it is by the essential law of its existence, that a Church is bound to hear Christ's voice, and give him

obedience. The society is not a Church wherein Christ has no authority; and a Church would be a Church no longer, were it released from the duty of bowing to his word.

What is a Church? By a Church is meant a society of professed Christian believers, watched over by Christ's ministers, and enjoying the ordinances which Christ has appointed for the edification of his body. Is not the simple statement of the definition enough to show that a Church must be subject to Christ? It is surely clear as day, that in such a society, the will of our Lord must be of supreme authority, and that its actings must be universally conformed to his commandments.

3. The extent of the duty. It is the duty of a Church of Christ, *at all times, under all circumstances, and in its whole procedure and administration*, to hear and obey Christ's voice.

1st, *At all times.* There are certain occasions, when, if a Church were to indicate any thing approaching to indifference about the mind of the Lord Jesus, none would venture to extenuate the guilt of its conduct. When a Church, for instance, is about to frame its Standards, to draw up the Confession of its Faith, and to lay down the great principles of its constitution, it is its undeniable duty to be guided by Christ's voice, and to attend to the utterance thereof in the Scriptures. It would have been a monstrous thing, had the Church of England, when preparing its Articles, taken any other rule than the mind of Christ, as represented in Holy Writ; or had our own Church turned a deaf ear to the Word, while engaged in composing our formularies. When the Church of Scotland was first determining what its doctrines, worship, discipline, and government, were to be, manifestly it behoved to ascertain Christ's will, and not to depart from

it in a single particular. So again, to take another instance, when a Church is about to form an alliance with the State, and when the terms of that alliance are to be arranged and determined, nothing can be more plain than that it is the Church's solemn duty to hear and obey Christ throughout the negotiation, and agree only to such terms as are consonant to his instructions and laws. It were wanton conduct, indeed, if a Church of Christ, at such a time, did not seek from first to last to know the mind of Him who gave it all its privileges and powers, to whom it entirely belongs, from whom it derives its being, and through whom and for whom it continues to exist,—if it did not, we say, seek to know His mind, and approve of, or reject, the conditions proposed to it, according as they could be held to be pleasing or displeasing in his sight.

These things are obvious. But is it only at such times that Christ's voice must be heard? Is it only, perchance, once or twice in a series of centuries, when a day of reformation has arisen, or a period of great adjustments has come, that a Church of Christ is bound, in its collective capacity, to repair to the fountain of truth, and to conform itself to the will of its heavenly Lord? Can a Church ever be entitled to say, "We will not *now* inquire into Christ's mind, we will not *now* hear Christ's voice; we will rest satisfied with the inquiry of a former age; enough for us that the Church heard Christ's voice 100 or 200 years ago?" Can there be a time when a Church may properly and lawfully declare, "We will keep by our formularies, and maintain our existing rules, *not* because we at present see them to be right and scriptural, *but* because they were formerly thought to be right and scriptural?" Or is there not an obligation on every Christian Church, instead of going now and then to the

great fountain of truth in God's Word, always to stand there, constantly to drink at it,—and, instead of now and then, at special seasons, hearing Christ's voice, at all times to hear it, and to obey it at all times? Christ always speaks, for his Word lives and abides; ought not his Churches, then, always to hear? Is the report of Christ's words better than his words themselves? The oracles of inspiration must never, never be locked up or laid aside. Never must they be withdrawn from the study, either of believers individually, or of the Churches into which believers are, by Christ's appointment, organized. The voice of Christ is in them. The voice of Christ, by the gracious energy of his Spirit, now and at all times issues out from them, and demands the audience and submission of the catholic Church, and of all its branches, as really, as directly, as powerfully and authoritatively, as it ever did at any time gone by. Of whatever advantage Church standards may be,—and important ends they are fitted to serve,—however expedient are compacts with the State, neither standards nor compacts can dislodge the Scriptures from the place which antecedently belonged to them, nor release a Church from its paramount duty, ever to draw its knowledge of the mind of Christ from the record in which Christ has placed it, and to obey Christ's voice, as coming out from the Bible, aye and until that voice is silent, and the Word, that liveth, dies.

2d, It is the duty of a Church to hear Christ's voice *under all circumstances*. The circumstances of Churches are various. The circumstances of the same Church are often not the same at different times. Sometimes a Church merely obtains toleration, at other times it suffers persecution, and at other times it enjoys the benefit of civil establishment. Contemporaneously, Churches have

been seen under all these varieties of circumstance. But is the great duty we speak of thereby affected? Does the obligation of it come and go according as the circumstances of a Church are changed? Is it only on a Church here and a Church there, and according to the state and position in which Churches are found, that the duty is binding? Shall we hold, that Churches which are persecuted must obey the voice of Christ—that Churches which are tolerated must obey it—but that the case is different with Churches which are established and endowed, and that to them Christ's voice comes with only a diminished authority, or, possibly, with no authority at all? Not so, surely. Be the circumstances of a Church what they may, they cannot destroy or impair Christ's right to be heard as its Prophet and Guide—to be obeyed as its King and Head. To maintain the contrary, is to say that the force of surrounding circumstances may take away what is essential to the being of a Church of Christ, and leave it a Church of Christ notwithstanding. No circumstances—such, for instance, as that of endowment, or compact with the civil power—are capable of creating new duties, which can interfere with, or weaken, in the least degree, the obligation of the great first duty of every Church to hear Christ's voice, and conform to his will. The relation of a Church to Christ cannot be changed. The place which belongs to Christ, in regard to every section of the wide community of them who profess faith in him, cannot be taken from Christ, given to, or shared with another. No change in the relation of a Church to the world, and the kingdoms of it, can modify its relation to Him. Changes there may be; trouble may be succeeded by rest; national protection and countenance may follow; but to Christ belongs the same high claim as ever to implicit, willing, and universal obedience.

3d, Every Church of Christ is bound to hear his voice, and do his will *in its whole procedure and administration*. To the catholic visible Church are given the Word, the ministry, and the ordinances of God. To that same Church, and to every branch thereof, Christ has given the keys of the kingdom of heaven. To each of the Churches, of which the great catholic community is composed, he has given the key of doctrine or knowledge, and the key of discipline or government. These keys belong to him as Mediator and Head,—for they are the keys of the house of David,—and he has intrusted them to his Churches, and to the office-bearers he has appointed to preside over them. By means of these keys, the whole work of every Church is performed ; one or other of them is the instrument of every function which a Church, or the office-bearers of it, can exercise. To the key of doctrine appertain the functions embraced in the ministry of the word and sacraments, and in the conduct of the worship of the sanctuary ; and to the key of government, those functions through which censures are inflicted or removed, spiritual offices are conveyed, and spiritual matters are determined and settled. The question, then, is, In what capacity do the Churches of Christ, and their office-bearers, hold the keys which Christ has given them ? Do they hold the keys in a lordly way, and as absolute proprietors of them, and so as entitled to do with them what they please ? Or, do they hold them as servants and stewards, to whom the keys have been intrusted for a definite end, and with whom a strict reckoning will be taken as to the manner in which they have been employed ? And the question further is, Have the Churches of the Redeemer been left without any directory for using the keys, and is it by their own views of expediency that they are to be governed in the discharge of that high trust ; or

has Christ provided them with an infallible rule and a sure record of his mind, according to which it is their duty to act in the exercise of every privilege and power he has bestowed? The answer, we apprehend, is clear. The Churches of Christ hold the keys ministerially; and are, to say the least, not less subject to him, as to all the functions with which he has invested them, than is a secular corporation to the supreme civil power that created it. The keys are held ministerially—even as the steward holds the keys that give access to the stores of his master; and they are only to be used according to Christ's instructions, and agreeably to his will. There is a directory, which every Church possesses; an infallible rule there is, and a sure record of the Saviour's mind, by which every Church must be guided. Every Church has the Bible—the Spirit's register of the will of Christ; and of it we can say that it "is profitable,"—not to individual believers alone, but to Churches collectively, and to their office-bearers as such,—“for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

But *can* Christ's mind be ascertained on every matter that belongs to the procedure and administration of a Church? Who doubts that it can? Let him who does so specify some of the matters—let him but condescend on one matter—belonging to the proper business of a Church of the Lord Jesus, concerning which the discovery of the mind of Christ should not be aimed at, and no prayer should be offered for guidance from above? One purpose for which the blessed Spirit is promised, and given to the Churches of Christ, is to teach them Christ's will. “When he, the Spirit of truth,” our Lord said, “is come, he will guide you into all truth. He shall glorify me; he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you.” “Ye have an unction from the Holy One,”

says John, "and ye know all things." A Church, wherein the Holy Ghost abides, will find its path, in every matter with which it has to deal, made plain before it, through the light coming down from the rules, or, at all events, the principles, contained in the Scriptures. Let the case be what it may, no Church will inquire and pray in vain that it may know what Christ would have it to do. When a faithful and obedient Church sends up its cry, "Speak, Lord, for thy servants hear," the Shepherd's voice will not be silent.

Are there not, however, points of a non-essential character, on which Christ's mind need not be sought? We put the question, because there are writers of the present day who seem to think that there are. But far from us be all sympathy with their views. If Christ's mind *can* be ascertained, it ought to be ascertained, whatever be the point which his servants have in hand. His will, surely, is better than any other will, and should have way in every thing. If he *has* a will on any point, and that will can be found out, it is no less than a rejection of his authority to disregard it. The pretext, that the point is non-essential, will be no defence. Although it were non-essential, the duty of obeying Christ remains. And what are non-essential things? Where shall a list of them be found? Who shall classify those essentials, on the one hand, to which the rules and principles of Scripture must be applied, and those non-essentials, on the other, in disposing of which a Church is not bound to pray that it may know Christ's will, but is entitled, so far as he is concerned, to do any thing it chooses?

The duty of a Christian Church is what we have now seen. We have set forth the component parts of that duty in detail. Gathering them together, they take the form of the following proposition, viz.:—

Every Church of Christ is bound, by the law of its existence, at all times, under all circumstances, and in its whole procedure and administration, to hear and obey Christ's voice from the Scriptures.

II. We are next to speak of the *liberty* of a Christian Church. As was formerly stated, the hearing of Christ's voice is a privilege which belongs to every Church—a liberty to which it is entitled, as well as a duty incumbent upon it. The liberty we claim for the Churches of Christ is that of being unmolested in the discharge of the duty which has just been set forth, and allowed to ascertain for themselves, and for the direction of their own proceedings, Christ's mind from the Word of God. This liberty or privilege we proceed to assert against four parties, viz., the Pope, the Church of a former age, the Clergy for the time being, and the Civil Magistrate.

1. We assert the liberty of the Church against *the Pope*. As our argument is not intended for the adherents of the Church of Rome, we shall go into no proof to show that the claims of the Roman bishop to be received as head of the Church catholic, and vicegerent of Christ, are unfounded. We assume, at this time, what all Protestants will grant, that these claims are unsupported by Scripture, and contrary to it. On this assumption, it follows that the Pope has no right to step between Christ's Churches and the record which contains the will of their Master; that he is wholly unauthorised to declare to them Christ's mind, or convey to them Christ's voice; and that he usurps a function which does not belong to him, when he attempts to dictate to them in any matter of Christian faith or practice.

2. We assert the liberty of every Church of Christ against *the Church of a former age*. For the Church

of ancient times, high pretensions are now made ; and not ours is the wish unduly to depreciate it. We value it as a historical witness, whose services are often useful in helping us to the truth : we can hold our peace when a purity and efficiency are not seldom ascribed to it in which we cannot believe : but it is a different thing when a religious authority is assigned it, to which we are required implicitly to bow—when, instead of leaving it to us as a useful assistant in learning the lessons of Christianity, men would raise it over our heads as an infallible teacher—and when the duty of hearing it is to be substituted for that of hearing Christ. To no Church of a former age, whether ancient or more modern, was the right or the necessary gift communicated for ruling over the consciences of succeeding generations. The time never was when the Church could say, “It is *my* right to read the Bible, and to interpret the mind of Christ for myself ; but a similar right will not belong to the Church of next century. I am entitled to hear Christ’s voice speaking through the Scriptures ; but the Church of next century must hear it only through me.” And there has been no inspiration since the days of the apostles. The Bible is the only inspired book in the world. We need not, therefore, regret that erring for unerring guides have not been given us, or that God has not displaced his own oracles to make room for the doubtful and corrupt traditions and the fallible interpretations of men.

Let us be more specific. When we assert the liberty of the Churches of Christ against the Church of a former age, we would be understood as doing so,—

1st, Against General Councils. The only basis, on which the claim for General Councils can solidly rest, is the Papal theory of their infallibility. To that theory there are two fatal objections. The first is, that it is

entirely destitute of proof; and the second is, that if the theory were true, there would remain to be encountered and overcome, before the voice of Christ could be known and his mind ascertained, the perplexing and insurmountable difficulty as to the true interpretation of the dogmas and formularies which General Councils have emitted, and also the difficulty as to what are the Councils which should be received as General, and consequently of infallible and absolute authority. In asserting the liberty of our Churches against the Church of a former age, we further assert it,—

2d, *Against the Christian Fathers.* As witnesses, the Fathers are readily acknowledged. Witnesses they are, whose opportunities qualify them for doing useful service by their testimony. In that character, no Church ought to despise their aid in its searches after truth. But a witness is not a judge. Ere we can bow to the Fathers as judges of controversy, and give up our Bibles for their folios, that so we may learn the mind of Christ, there are two difficulties that must be removed out of the way. One is the lack of all evidence that they were not men liable to err and to misinterpret, as we ourselves are; and the other is the notorious fact, that there is scarcely a doctrine or a text of Scripture, respecting the truth or meaning of which the Fathers are not, to a greater or less extent, at variance among themselves. Finally, in asserting the liberty of a Christian Church against the Church of a former age, we assert it,—

3d, *Against our own Reformers.* We point not here to the private writings with which these distinguished servants of Jesus enriched the Church catholic. We are not aware that the claim has ever been preferred by any to have these writings considered as supreme and ultimate standards, to which the Churches are bound to have re-

course, that they may know the will of Christ. It is to the Articles and Confessions, drawn up by the Reformers, that we now refer. We refer to the formularies which they left us, and which we acknowledge as standards, and which constitute the glory of the Churches of the Reformation. And we say of these formularies, that they must be kept in their own place. Their authors never designed them as ultimate standards of appeal. They knew better what was due to holy Writ, as the only sure depository of Christ's laws, and the sole fountain of his truth. The usual name, Confessions of Faith, indicated clearly the subordinate character which it was intended that these documents should bear. In the formularies themselves did the men of God who wrote them engross the principles we are here maintaining. Propositions are in them,—we may say in them all, and in none more fully or strongly than in our own Confession,—declaratory of the duty and liberty of every Christian Church to go for itself, from day to day, continually to the sacred oracles—to learn there his mind—to hear there his voice—that it may know, and that it may do, in all its proceedings, what is pleasing before him. And our formularies are retained, and honoured, and obeyed, not for the sake of the men who prepared them, but only because they are believed to give a just view of the doctrines and rules of duty which are laid down in God's Word; and so soon as they are discovered to be inconsistent with Scripture—so soon as Christ's voice, speaking from the Bible, is found to be at variance with their expositions and announcements, that instant their obligation and authority cease, not only upon individual believers, but upon the office-bearers who have vowed to adhere to them, and upon the Churches which have held them forth, as em-

bodying the principles of their belief, and the rules of their administration, before the world.

3. We assert the liberty of every Christian Church *against the Clergy or Office-bearers of the Church for the time being*. The office-bearers of the Church are not without authority ; but their authority is only ministerial. They are not the lords of God's heritage,—they have no power to require assent or obedience, without regard to the accordance of their doctrines or decisions with the supreme and infallible standard of the Word. What authority could be higher than that of an apostle ? Yet Paul was liable to review under an appeal to the Scriptures ; and the Bereans were ennobled by the scrutiny to which they subjected him. When the apostles and elders met in council at Jerusalem, to settle a great controversy which had arisen in the Church, and when, after grave deliberation and argument, carried on in the presence of the assembled disciples, they had found what they sought, the mind of Christ upon the point, they scorned not, in the circular letter containing their deliverance, to unite with themselves the believing multitude of their hearers, as concurring on the same grounds which had satisfied them ; and the inspired historian tells us that the decision of the apostles and elders “pleased the whole Church,” not merely, it is manifest, because it *was* the decision of the apostles and elders, but because the whole Church had heard and were convinced by the reasons which had brought their spiritual rulers to a unanimous conclusion. If, then, even apostles would not interpose themselves between believers and the fountains of truth,—between the Church and the oracles whence Christ's voice proceeds, shall the office-bearers of modern times be permitted to do it ? No, the thing must not be. The daring pretensions of an aspiring priesthood, which demands the

custody of men's consciences, and their implicit faith, must be resisted to the uttermost ; and the Churches of Christ must cleave to the Bible more closely, and listen to Christ's own voice more eagerly, more affectionately, and more submissively than ever.

It is, in this country, the acknowledged right and liberty of every private Christian to refuse to attend the ministry of a pastor by whom he is not edified. In other words, the *question of duty*, as to accepting or declining the pastoral superintendence of a particular minister, is left to the settlement of Christ's followers individually,—each of them determining it for himself. It is a Christian's inalienable liberty, with the Word of God in his hand, and having reference to his own spiritual wants, to the gifts of Christ's ministers, and to the adaptation of these gifts to his own soul's improvement, to be free and uncontrolled by man in the determination of that question. It is his privilege as a British subject ; and we hold it to be his privilege as a subject of Christ. No power, be it civil or be it ecclesiastical, is entitled, on that point, to coerce him. "The head of every man," as well as of every Church, "is Christ." It is a point which is necessarily submitted to his judgment,—on which he cannot avoid making up his mind, in order to the guidance of his conduct,—on which, moreover, no third party is qualified, or has received authority, to decide in his room ; and man must, therefore, leave it between his conscience and Christ the head.

A Christian congregation has a similar liberty. It is only when the pastoral office in a congregation is about to be filled, that a congregation, as such, is called upon to act. On that solemn occasion the pastoral tie has to be formed, not between an individual, or a number of isolated individuals, and a minister, but between an organized

congregation,—one of the Churches of the Redeemer, —and the person who is to feed their souls. As union without mutual consent is in the former case impossible, and the attempt to create it unlawful, so must it be in the latter. The bond between the pastor and a single believer is not more sacred, or more dependent on the conscientious convictions of duty which that believer entertains, than is the bond between the pastor and the local community or church over which he is to preside. The union between pastor and flock, like that between Christ and his people, is essentially a voluntary union. As in the one case, so in the other, unless the parties are mutually agreed, no union in reality takes place. Men may say there is a union ; but a union there is not where consent has not been given. In the matter of their union with a pastor, therefore, the congregation has a right to be free. The conscience of the congregation is not to be forced. The office-bearers of the Church are not the lords of God's heritage, nor the masters of conscience. When the point of duty, as to the acceptance or refusal of a pastor proposed to them, has to be determined by a congregation, no warrant can be shown for ecclesiastical rulers thrusting themselves and their view between the congregational conscience and him to whom the congregation will have to answer, and from whom light and direction are to be sought. The sheep, congregationally as well as individually, must hear Christ's voice for themselves, and decide, on the hearing of it, what they are to do.

4. We assert the liberty of a Christian Church against the *Civil Magistrate*.

1st, The first thing that meets us here is what may be called the high Erastian view. According to it, the Christian magistrate has an inherent spiritual power,

which entitles him to exercise authority over the Churches of Christ in matters of a spiritual nature. It is obvious that, if he has such a power, all the religious communities in the realm, comprehending those which enjoy no civil establishment, are subject to his control and dictation in regard to their doctrine and internal discipline. During the former struggles which our Scottish Church maintained for freedom, this lofty claim was actually made. The supremacy of the king, in all causes, ecclesiastical as well as civil, was declared in statutes and oaths of allegiance to be an inherent and essential prerogative of the Crown. This dogma is plainly opposed to *the duty* of a Church, as before laid down. If the inherent spiritual supremacy of the Sovereign, or of the State, can be made good in argument, *the duty* must be given up, because it will be thereby disproved. But, in order to make it good, let us see what requires to be done. The only instruments, whereby spiritual procedure of any kind can be carried on, are the keys. The key of doctrine alone is capable of regulating the doctrine of any Church; and the key of discipline alone is capable of regulating Church censures and administration. It must be shown, then, that the custody and power of the keys are not confined to the Churches of Christ, but that the magistrate, as such, has received them too. Can this be shown? Assuredly it is not, by such cases as those of David and Solomon, who were not only kings, but prophets of God, and who, in their character of prophets, had office and authority in the Church. The thing to be proved is, that, in a Christian country, the magistrate, as such, irrespective of age, sex, knowledge, and other qualifications, possesses, as a prerogative with which Christ has invested him, the power of the keys, and authority, not merely *circa sacra*, but *in sacris*.

And after this has been shown, and it is made to appear that the power of the keys is not given to the Churches and their office-bearers exclusively, but that they and the civil magistrate share it between them, it will be found that enough has not been done. It will then have to be shown that the magistrate is the rightful lord of the conscience of the Churches existing within the commonwealth,—that when *they* are to use the keys, they are bound to walk implicitly by his instructions,—and that he is the divinely-commissioned interpreter of the mind of Christ for the guidance of their conduct in their own affairs. We grant that he is entitled to go to Scripture and learn Christ's mind from it for himself, and for the regulation of his own proceedings in connection with spiritual things; but what we must have proof for is the opinion that he is warranted to interrupt a Christian Church in its direct converse with the Word, and with Christ's mind as there recorded, and to thrust himself and his own reading between, and compel it to act according to what he thinks or asserts the mind of Christ to be. By the Romish theory, the magistrate is bound to learn Christ's mind from the teaching of the Church; and, erroneous and evil as the principle is, more can be said for it than for the tenet that the Church must learn the mind of Christ from the teaching of the magistrate. The former has the advantage in respect of plausibility; while both are alike unsupported by evidence, and without foundation in truth.

The Church of England, we fear, must be held to maintain the doctrine of an inherent, or divine right in the Crown to dictate to Christ's Churches and ministers in the exercise of the functions with which Christ has invested them. In the thirty-seventh Article the sovereign is declared to have "the chief government of all

estates, whether they be ecclesiastical or civil, *in all causes* ;” and, looking to the place where the declaration is found, it is plain that we must regard it, not as the simple statement of a matter of fact, but as the exhibition of a point of faith and religious belief. The Article explains, “ We give not to our princes the ministering either of God’s Word, or of the sacraments ;” but this is the only reservation. The power of the key of doctrine, so far as the determining of “ all causes” about “ the ministering of the Word and of the sacraments” is concerned, and the power of the key of discipline, to the same extent, at least, are certainly ascribed to the civil ruler of a Christian kingdom, and held to belong to him by warrant of Scripture. *

Have we not, then, here a tenet which goes to fetter and impede the Church of God in the land, and that in the matter of the duty which it owes to Christ of hearing and obeying his voice, as coming from the Word? If it be the duty of the Church and its office-bearers to do their whole work according to the will of Christ, as they find that will revealed in the Bible, or indicated in the principles which the Bible lays down, how can it, at the same time, be the prerogative of the prince to decide finally in what way this work is to be done, and to give ultimate judgment in all causes ecclesiastical? It may be urged that there are questions relating to the adminis-

* It is true that the Article says that it gives to the magistrate “ that only prerogative which we see to have been given always to all godly princes in Holy Scripture by God himself.” But then it defines what that prerogative is considered to be. “ That is,” it goes on to say, “ that they should rule all states and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether they be ecclesiastical or temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers.” There is nothing here which limits the magistrate’s authority over the ecclesiastical estate to the persons and property of those belonging to it ; and that all “ ecclesiastical causes” are within his jurisdiction, is expressly taught in the previous part of the Article.

tration of a Church which must be settled by a reference to Christ's will. We deny that such questions there are. We maintain, as was formerly argued, that every question as to the duty of Christ's ministers, and as to the government of the Churches of which the catholic body is made up, is a question as to the will of Christ. Even where what has been called, with doubtful accuracy, a discretionary power, is lodged with them,—that is to say, where the rules of procedure are not formally given, and the case is one for which the Word gives no express directions, still must the mind of Christ be sought for as the guide. There *can* be no case, in the proper business of a Church, on which Scripture *principles* do not bear, and for the right solution and settlement of which Scripture principles do not suffice. And there can be no case, whether relating to doctrine, to worship, to discipline, or spiritual government, which may not, through the diligent, believing, and prayerful study of the Word, be conclusively disposed of in the way that corresponds with Christ's will, and shall be ratified by his approving sanction.

2d, As the magistrate has no inherent or divine right to the office of an ecclesiastical ruler, so neither does he acquire a right to govern Christ's Churches, when he gives them the benefit of an Establishment.

It is very needful to mark well the distinction between a Church Establishment and a Church. The former exists for the use of the latter, but they are not to be confounded, as though they were one and the same. They are no more the same than are a ship and the passengers whom it carries across the ocean,—or a place of worship and the congregation that assemble in it. A Church Establishment is the apparatus of buildings, endowments, civil sanctions and privileges, which it is the

province of the State to provide and construct. Over the Establishment—that is to say, over the things that constitute the Establishment—the State is supreme in reference to man. It has a sacred duty, but it is answerable only to Christ. It has a right, so far as man is concerned, to give the Establishment to any Church it may select, and at any time it thinks best. It may determine the creed, the forms, and the polity, to the purposes of which the Establishment shall be applied. As it gives the Establishment, so it may withdraw it, when it deems it proper so to do. Its power over the Establishment is complete, and ought not to be challenged; but power over the Establishment is one thing,—power over the Church on which the Establishment is bestowed, is quite different. Our acknowledgment of the one power does not involve an acknowledgment of the other. The power of taking away the Establishment from the Church, because the keys are administered in a way of which the State disapproves, is distinct from the power of authoritatively prescribing to it the line of duty. The former is the power of an equal; the latter that of a master. An equal may say, “Unless you conform to my views, I shall withdraw my countenance and help;” but a master alone can say, “You shall do as I command you.”

When the State bestows an Establishment, it confers a valuable boon. But what we affirm is, that the boon gives the State no right to step between a Church and the only sure record of the mind of Christ, in any matter whatever, or in any department of its spiritual operations. If the State, by its boon, could acquire that right in any thing, it could acquire it in every thing. And what would the right amount to? It would amount to no less than to a removal of the Bible from the study of the Church, and the substitution in its room of civil

decrees and acts of Parliament. It would imply an obligation on the Church to regard the voice of the State as the voice of Christ,—to turn away from Scripture when seeking to know Christ's mind, and to look for it in the decisions of the judges, and the commentaries of her Majesty's Government. If it could be proved, which it never can, that a right, implying these things, is necessarily vested in the State when it establishes Christ's Church, the conclusion would be, not that the Church is bound to recognise the right, but that an Establishment is unlawful, and cannot be accepted of by any Christian Church without deep sin, and treason against the King of Zion.

The power of the State must ever be limited to what the State gives. No further power is needed for preventing the abuse of its gifts. No further power is compatible with the duty of every Church to Christ, and its sacred liberty of walking by the rules and principles of the book which contains his will, and of which his Churches are the appointed custodiers. No doubt any Church may err, and the establishment it enjoys may be used in a way which is unsatisfactory. In that case, the State has its remedy. Let it exert its undenied power over what it gave, and the evil will be redressed. Is it objected that the Church must soon lose its establishment on this plan, and the policy of the State will be thereby defeated? * We reply, that that is a different question; and, were the dreaded result to follow, better far that it should, than that the Church be debarred from obeying her Lord, and hearing his voice as it issues from the Word.

But it will be urged that, *in mixed questions*, where civil consequences are attached to spiritual procedure, the

* The Irish Presbyterian Church has its endowments confessedly on this footing; and the system, it must be admitted, works well. We have there, at least, the example of a Church which is endowed by the

paramount authority of the magistrate must come in.* The answer is, that it may, and yet it must not. It may come in, to regulate and dispose of the civil consequences which such questions involve; for these always belong to its lawful domain. Yet it must not come in, to supplant the Bible, and take the place of Christ, by determining for the Church what the spiritual procedure shall be. Because the kings of the earth attach civil consequences to the spiritual acts of the servants of the King of Zion, it does not follow that the responsibility of Christ's servants to Christ himself is lessened, and that their spiritual acts are to be governed by any other standard than the requirements of his will. Because the kings of Tarshish and of the isles bring presents, and the kings of Sheba and Seba offer gifts, these kings are not entitled to say,—“The servants of Christ must now listen to us; the benefactions with which we crown their acts give a mixed, a semi-secular character to all that they do, and draw their spiritual proceedings within the range of civil jurisdiction; they must henceforth, therefore, listen to us, and learn the will of their Master, not from his Word, but from the rules we prescribe, and from our decisions in causes ecclesiastical.” There is no dispute as to the interest the magistrate must have in the endowments and

State, and which is free, at the same time, to hear Christ's voice, and to follow its conscience in obeying his laws.

* Mr Gladstone puts this as follows :—“Since civil and ecclesiastical consequences are thus mixed up (in an Established Church), and both flow from acts properly ecclesiastical, there arises a necessity for this mixed authority (an authority neither purely ecclesiastical nor purely civil), which, having as much sympathy as possible with both bodies, and representing both, shall be more akin to this kind of jurisdiction than either of them, taken singly, would afford; accordingly, the head of the State, under the condition that he shall be also a member of the Church, is invested with it. He exercises an appellate jurisdiction; he judges not the cause, but the judgment; assuming the grounds which are supplied by ecclesiastical law, and inquiring whether its principles have been fairly applied to the particular subject-matter.”—*The State in its Relation with the Church*, p. 118.

civil effects which he attaches to the actings of the Church. But that interest neither qualifies nor entitles him to enter the spiritual province, and give the law as to what the actings of the Church are to be. No; he is not, on that account, the head of the Church, nor the revealer to the Church of Christ's will. When the spiritual procedure of the Church does not please him, let him cut off the civil effects which were accustomed to follow, and lay his arrest on the endowments. That he may do. More than that he may not do, without assuming a prerogative which does not belong to him, violating the relation between Christ and the Church, and destroying the liberty which it is his duty to guard.

The true end of an Establishment ought to be considered. It cannot accord with that end to interrupt Christ's Churches in the discharge of the duty he has laid upon them, or to take from them any of the privileges he has conferred. On the contrary, if it be a Church's duty to hear and obey the voice of Christ from the Word, and if every Church's just privilege be to have its conscience enlightened and governed in all things by the direct instrumentality of the oracles of God, the true end of the establishment which the civil power bestows, must embrace the facilitating of the performance of the one, and the maintenance and security of the other.

3d, The State cannot, in virtue of a *compact* with a Church, acquire a right to prescribe in ecclesiastical affairs.

It is every Church's *present* duty, as has been seen, to draw Christ's mind from the Scripture; and former creeds and constitutions are no further binding than as they are accordant therewith. No paction, therefore, can be lawful, or of valid obligation, if it is inconsistent with this great truth; and supposing it were the case that a Church

had tied itself it up, and, after once examining the Word, and deducing its doctrines and principles from that sacred source, had engaged to the State that it would do so no more, the transaction would be incompetent and null, and would afford the State no proper ground for compulsory interference, when it discovered its sin, returned to the discharge of the duty it had forsaken, and began again to exercise the privilege it had unwarrantably renounced.

But when a Church has agreed and promised to the State that it will teach a specified theological system, and adhere to a particular discipline and form of government, is not the State entitled to come down upon that Church with its commands and its penalties, for the purpose of enforcing the observance of the compact? The State is not so entitled. The compact of the Church is essentially conditional. Whether the point be expressed or not, it is necessarily implied that the mind of Christ, as presently ascertained, on all the matters of faith and polity comprehended in the compact, is ever supreme, and that there is no obligation on the Church to observe it, if it discovers in the Bible that the mind of Christ is different from the views which the compact embodies. A Church, by its compact, can say no more than this,—“ We agree to teach certain doctrines, and to walk by certain principles and rules, because we believe these doctrines, principles, and rules, to be set forth by the Lord Jesus in the infallible Word ; but if, at any time hereafter, we find that we are in error, and that the voice of Christ disowns them, we will teach these doctrines no longer, and no longer walk by these principles and rules.” To oblige a Church, against its conscience, to adhere to the compact, would be to bring the Church of a former day between it and the Word. It has been shown already, that to the Church of a former day no such place can be assigned.

The thing could not be done, without setting aside the Church's present duty, and wresting from it its inalienable privilege as regards the hearing of the voice of Christ.*

An important obligation, however, there is, which lies upon a Church, when it finds it necessary to depart from the compact. If the State will not consent to a change in the terms of connection, it ought at once to resign its establishment. Should it neglect to do this, the remedy is obvious,—the State can take the establishment away.†

* The theory of Mr Morren of Greenock seems to be, that the Church of Scotland has tied herself down in essentials, and has allowed the State to tie her down in non-essentials. So far as I have been able to gather from a careful examination of his recent tracts, and particularly of his Propositions, and the views he puts forth in support of them, this is the sum and substance of his theological argument. The inevitable consequence appears to me to be, that the Church of Scotland has now no freedom, no liberty at all. The Church of a former day drew up a Confession of Faith, embodying the essentials of doctrine and discipline, declared it to be her creed, and obtained its ratification by the State; and on this account he holds that the Church of the present day has no liberty to alter it. The Church of a former day acquiesced in certain determinations of the State as to non-essentials; and therefore he maintains that the Church of the present day is bound in these non-essentials to walk in the steps of our forefathers. And his view further is, not merely that the State may withdraw its benefits, if the Church shall now be convinced that the mind of Christ was formerly misunderstood, whether as to essentials or as to non-essentials, and shall act on that conviction, but that the State may proceed compulsively against the Church, and pursue her with actions for damages, in order to force her to adhere to the old agreement. From this it must follow, that the *Established* Church is not at liberty to hear and obey Christ's voice, as it comes to her direct from the Scriptures, be the matters essential or be they non-essential with which she happens to be dealing. My position, on the other hand, is, that every Church, whether established or non-established, must have that liberty; and that to say that a Church, by being established, or in alliance, on certain terms, with the State, necessarily gives it up, is to say that a necessary condition of the establishment of religion is, the bringing of the State and the Church of a former day between the Church now existing and the mind of Christ as declared in the Scriptures. The advocates of Voluntary views have always said this; and the opponents of these views have been accustomed to admit that, if it could be proved, the Voluntary cause would be theologically carried.

† All this is on the supposition that the Establishment is the gift of the State, and is held by the Church on the understanding that she is to keep by the compact. I am aware that in England it is often con-

But this is the only remedy. Even in a case so extreme as that of a Church knowingly giving up the arrangements of the compact, and yet retaining the advantages derived from the State,—even in such a case, the State may not arrogate spiritual power, or obtrude itself on the Church, as Christ's interpreter and vicegerent. And much less can the State do so, when it happens to be matter of dispute whether the compact has been departed from or not,—when the State itself believes the compact to be broken, while the Church is as sincerely convinced that it has been kept to the letter.

We have thus argued that the State has no inherent right, that it can have no right by establishment, and that it can have none by compact, to deny the most perfect freedom to a Church in all spiritual affairs,—or to prescribe to it in the exercise of the power of the keys, which are the divinely appointed instruments of its authority. If the doctrine is true, there are important inferences, of a practical nature, some of which may be mentioned. First, as regards the law of England for the appointment of the higher clergy. If the ecclesiastics, on whom the choice of the individual who is to fill a vacant bishopric devolves, fail to nominate the person suggested to them by the sovereign, they incur the penalties of a *præmunire*. They may be convinced that the Crown nominee is unfit, and particularly, that he is deficient in the qualifications for the episcopal office, which, with so much minuteness, are detailed in Holy Writ ; but it does not signify. The weighty punishments of civil law hang over their heads, and will infallibly descend, if they do not elect him. Vir-

tended that the Establishment there is, for the most part, not the State's gift. Without inquiring how far this is correct, it is enough to say, that the above observations are meant for those cases in which the State establishes or endows.

tually, the State forbids them to have any respect to Christ's declared will in what they do; it commands them to shut their eyes to the written Word, and their ears to the voice of Christ, and, without the exercise of any judgment of their own, to choose, like puppets, just as they are bid. The prelates, who have to consecrate their newly elected colleague, are, we believe, under equal restraint. With the law of Christ before them, as recorded in 1 Tim. iii. 2-7, and Tit. i. 7-9, they may see it as clear as day, that that law will be broken if the investiture takes place. Yet no option is left them. The penalties of a *præmunire* are at hand, and will be exacted if Christ's law is obeyed, and the bishop-elect is not consecrated.* Our inference is, that the law of England is, in this matter, contrary to the just liberty of the Church, and, moreover, an injury to Christ, because it aims at preventing his servants from the discharge of the duty they owe to him.

Next, with respect to lay patronage. The appointment to office in a Christian Church is obviously a spiritual affair, involving a grave question as to the religious good of men; and requiring, as it confessedly does, the exercise of Church power in the conveyance of office, it further involves a question as to the mind of Christ,—

* Mr Gladstone's remark upon this, when meeting the objection that the Church of England is enslaved by the royal supremacy, is, that "Of course the governors of the Church *would be* bound to incur the civil penalty, rather than confirm or consecrate, should a person ecclesiastically incompetent be presented to them." With great submission, there is another thing which the governors of the Church are at present bound to do. The constitutional law of their establishment is, that the bishops shall consecrate the person presented, *whatever their opinion of his qualifications may be*. The condition on which they hold their emoluments is, that they shall take the sovereign's word, be it right or be it wrong, as conclusive upon the point. If this be inconsistent with the duty they owe to Christ, and to the very plain rules he has given on the subject of qualification (and we fear it is very inconsistent indeed), then are the governors of the Church bound at once to resign their connection with an Establishment whose terms they cannot fulfil without sin.

which every Church is bound, and ought to be free, to consider and decide. The question, *Who* ought to be constituted a pastor of the Church, and an ambassador of the Gospel of God,—and *who* ought to have the care of any part of Christ's flock? is a question entirely and exclusively for the Church itself, and it ought to be settled by a reference to the rules, principles, and tests, supplied by Christ in the Word. The system of lay patronage, therefore, which converts the nomination to the pastoral office into a civil right, and takes it away from the Church, its office-bearers and members, *as such*, is in so far an encroachment on the Church's freedom, and a hindrance in the way of its duty of obedience to Christ.*

Again, as to actions for damages against a Church, or its office-bearers. We ask here no impunity for Churchmen, when they commit what is truly civil wrong. We can conceive of spiritual functions being abused for the gratification of a malevolent feeling, and made the instruments of injury which the magistrate might lawfully redress; † but this we must say, that no Church which is engaged in transacting, to the best of its judgment, its own proper business,—which is seeking, *bona fide*, to ascertain Christ's mind with respect to the affairs of his house, and administering these affairs according to the views it has been led to adopt,—should be punished with damages, or in any other way, because the magistrate is of opinion that it has mistaken Christ's mind, or because there is a compact with which the magistrate conceives the policy

* The objection above applies only when lay patronage, as is usually the case, gives a title to the *office*, as well as to the benefice. If it gave a title merely to the *benefice*,—as in Scotland it was understood to do until the late decisions in the civil courts,—the liberty of the Church is not infringed. The system of civil presentations to benefices may be, and we think is, a bad arrangement; but still a Church can submit to it. To the system of civil presentations to spiritual offices, we hold that a Church cannot submit, without a breach of duty to Christ.

† *E. g.*, Defamation from the pulpit.

it is pursuing to be at variance. To take a case for illustration: The question, How, and under what essential conditions, the tie between pastor and people should be formed, is undeniably spiritual, and can only be determined by ascertaining Christ's will from the Word. Clearly the Bible must rule it. To the Bible every Church must look for guidance in the matter. This, accordingly, the Church of Scotland has done; and it has come to believe that the pastoral relation cannot lawfully be formed without the consent of the flock. The Church of Scotland, like other Churches, is liable to err,—it may err in this particular view, although we are persuaded that it does not; but the point we maintain is, that the State has no right to punish the Church for doing as its conscience directs,—no right to give its office-bearers damages to pay, because they carry out into practice the principle which they believe that Christ in the Word has taught them; and that to do so is to check the Church in the performance of its duty, and to violate its necessary freedom. We said before, and we say again, that the State, if dissatisfied, may withdraw its establishment. It may take *what it gave*; but it must not coerce. There is a wide difference, in principle, between the withdrawal of the establishment and actions for damages. By the former, the State exercises its own liberty; by the latter, it destroys the liberty of the Church. By the former it says, "I will no more be your ally;" by the latter it says, "You shall be my slave."*

* It is here that the great, and, we believe, in the present temper of our civil rulers, the insurmountable difficulty of settling the Scottish Church question so as to prevent a disruption, lies. To agree to be liable to actions of damages, or to civil coercion of any kind (other than the withdrawal of the temporalities which the State confers), if the Church is not governed in a particular way, is neither more nor less than to agree that the State shall have a right to interpose itself between Christ's servants and the mind and will of their Master in the Scriptures. It is

Lastly, as to the reduction of spiritual sentences by the State or its tribunals. The Churches of Christ, like other bodies, may go wrong; and, doubtless, their sentences are sometimes invalid. The State is entitled to look at these sentences; it may form its opinion, for its own guidance, as to their validity; and it is supreme with regard to all their civil effects. But the State has no spiritual power,—it has not the keys,—it cannot reduce the spiritual sentences which a Church has pronounced. It may hold these sentences to have been passed on incompetent grounds, and therefore to be null; but it cannot make them null. May it not, however, compel the Church to reduce them, or to treat them as void, and of no effect? Not, it is plain, without forcing the conscience of the Church, and taking away its liberty. The Church has sought to walk by Christ's rules; it believes the grounds of the sentences, and the sentences themselves, to be warranted by the Word; to the magistrate belongs no dictatorship over it.

to renounce the Church's sacred liberty, to put the State in place of Christ, and to make the magistrate the governor of the Church. To acknowledge in the State a right to compel the Church to obey what the State thinks are the laws of Christ, and what may, possibly, be the laws of Christ, is to constitute the State the interpreter of Christ's mind *for the Church*, and, therefore, to deprive the Church of that immediate converse with Christ's Statute-Book, which is at once its duty and its inalienable privilege. To consent that the State shall have a right to compel the Church to-morrow to obey what the Church to-day regards as the law of Christ, is to consent that the Church shall be less free to-morrow to interpret Scripture for its own guidance than it is to-day; it is to consent that the liberty of the Church to hear Christ's voice from the Word shall terminate with the present exercise of it, and to make the Church's present interpretations of Scripture binding upon the Church, be they right or wrong, as its future rule. The liability of the Church's office-bearers to actions of damages and civil coercion, when their ecclesiastical proceedings are not according to the views and determinations of the State, is now fixed as a condition of the Scottish Establishment; and no law of relief, however good in itself as regards Non-Intrusion, can be accepted of without the sacrifice of the Church's liberty, and the renunciation of its duty to Christ, if such liability be not explicitly and effectually removed.

After all, it may be said that the liberty of an Established Church is provided for, in this country, by the law of toleration, and the free allowance to every man to become a Dissenter. This has been said, strangely and absurdly said, by men of gravity and learning. The truth is, that the law of toleration has nothing whatever to do with an Established Church, or its liberty. The Churches it has to do with are non-established Churches, and the liberty it guarantees is liberty to them. But is not every one that chooses allowed to secede? No doubt of it. The right of private judgment belongs to every British subject. Liberty to individuals, as such, however, is different from liberty to a Church, as such. Each individual member of a society may be permitted to act freely and independently by himself, while the society to which he belongs is not even suffered to meet. What we now contend for is, the liberty of those religious bodies called Churches, to which Christ has given his laws, his ordinances, and his ministers. The question is not about the liberty of Christians, but about the liberty of Christian Churches. The right, indeed, for which we contend, on behalf of every Church of Christ in its collective capacity, is precisely similar to the right of private judgment in an individual Christian. It rests on the same grounds, and is supported by the same irrefragable arguments. We claim every friend of the latter as one who must, in consistency, be a friend of the former. It is the right of private judgment which we are maintaining on an extended scale. We concede it to individuals; we concede it to the State; and what we say is, that it must also be conceded to every Church of the Redeemer. A man has a conscience, and it is his right to have that conscience left free. The State has a conscience, which also must be free. And a Church has a conscience, whose freedom

it cannot sell or surrender, and whose freedom it is unlawful for any to abridge or take away.

So much, then, for a Christian Church's liberty. The successive points which have been urged in vindication of it, may be linked together, and thrown into the shape of the following proposition, viz.—that

Neither the State, nor any other party,—be it Pope, Bishop, Council, Fathers, or Reformers,—has a right, or can, whether by purchase, by compact, or in any other way, acquire a right to come between the conscience of any Church of Christ, and the mind of Christ, as presently ascertained by that Church for itself from the Word of God.

My fathers and brethren ! the principles with which we have been dealing are “the present truth.” The old and never-tiring adversary of the Church of our Lord is mustering his hosts over Christendom against them. His plans seem deeply and skilfully laid. His instruments are busy. Through his crafty management multitudes are everywhere, unconsciously to themselves, doing his work, and advancing his grand design. The last campaign of a war, which has not ceased for nearly six thousand years, would seem to be approaching. The great catholic community of gospel believers has witnessed and struggled unto death in time past, on behalf of the prophetic office of its Saviour, and on behalf of his priesthood too. One thing remains ; the world must be made to know that Christ is a king, and that there is a kingdom on earth of which his will is the rule. His faithful people must rally round his throne, and assert, be the cost what it may, the rights of his crown. All that the sufferings and the blood of martyrs have won, will be lost if the government be taken from his shoulders. Let his Word

be set aside—let his ordinances and institutions be subjected to any will but his own—and, in natural and necessary consequence, let the hearts and lives of Christians go from under his sway,—let these things be done, and the gates of hell will have prevailed. We have been told, and we believe, that they shall not prevail. But why has this been told us? That we may stand idly by, when the heathen rage, and the world is taking counsel against the Lord, and against his Anointed? Not so, my brethren. It is to animate us for the conflict, from which none of us may shrink—to give us confidence in the hour of danger, and fortitude amid the hot fire of persecution, by the prospect of deliverance and victory. The victory that is to be gained must be the victory of the Church. Through sorrow and trouble, through privation and death, she *may* have to go to it; and she probably will. But forward, without faltering, she must go. For Christ's sake—for her own—aye, for the world's, the victory must be secured. If she faint not, the victory is her's.

An important part in this great struggle seems destined for the Church of our fathers. The truth, for which evangelical Christians throughout the world must now prepare to contend, and, in all appearance, to suffer, is a truth for which she has had to contend and to suffer at former periods of her history. It is no new thing to her to be obliged to peril all for the headship of the Lord Jesus, and for the liberty of his servants and people to hear and obey him. She can reckon up many faithful witnesses among her sons, who, in time past, have bled in this cause. The bleak moors of our native land furnish many memorials of the courageous testimony borne by her children of old. And now God calls her to these her "first works" once more. Now, again, she must take her stand against principalities and powers, and maintain,

at all hazards, the rights of Christ's crown. In these days on which we have fallen, the fences of the sanctuary of spiritual rule have again been broken down, and the invader stands now in the house of our Lord. She must buckle on again her ancient armour, and in the name of the Lord do valiantly.

The fiery trial, which seems about to try Christ's disciples everywhere, is first to be entered on by her. But let her not murmur for this. It is an honour to be so singled out. It is an honour, surely, to be thus placed in the van of the Churches of Christ. It is an honour—may we not say?—which the faith and constancy of our martyred ancestors have obtained for her. O may she not prove unworthy! May grace be given her to set a good example to Christendom, and heroically to lead the way before the rest of the followers of the Lamb!

But they say we are contending, and are about to suffer, for trifles—for nothing but matters of punctilio. For trifles! For matters of punctilio! Is it so, my fathers and brethren? Is it not true that the magistrate has thrust himself between our consciences and the record of our Master's will, in every point of our spiritual duty, and of our discipline and government? Has he not said that we shall not preach the Gospel, or administer the Sacraments, in districts where, in our solemn judgment and belief, Christ called us so to do? Has he not forbidden us to ordain to the office of pastor, and to give the full power of both keys, in opposition to our conscientious persuasion of what the laws of our heavenly King require? Has he not forbidden us to depose from the ministry men whom the Bible, in our understanding of it, taught us to regard as guilty of great sin? And has he not commanded us—is he not, by actions of damages, seeking to compel us—to invest with the function of ambassadors for Christ,

persons whom we believe it to be contrary to Christ's will, as signified in the Word, that we should so invest them? Yes, these things he has done. And these are not trifles in the eye of the Christian. Would to God that there were nothing but matters of punctilio between us and the Church of Scotland's deliverance from impending dangers! For the sake of the nation, which we believe to be provoking the anger of Him whose anger is terrible, if "kindled but a little,"—for the sake of the nation, more than for our own sakes, would that this were the case! The emergency is too solemn for men to stand upon punctilios, and we trust that, as humble disciples of Jesus, we should be enabled to renounce them.

How many spiritual questions have of late been entertained in the magistrate's courts, and decisions given respecting them, *for the purpose of binding our consciences as the servants of Christ!* Two of these we shall name. The question which relates to the pastoral tie, and the conditions necessary to its scriptural formation; the question, especially, as to the rights Christ has given in that matter, to the members of the Church, is surely a question of a spiritual nature. Yet, in regard to that question, the liberty of the Church to hear Christ's voice has been violently taken from her. Spiritual though it be, the courts of the State have decided it; and that not merely for themselves, and to guide their own proceedings, with respect to the temporalities of the Church, but also, and mainly, for us, and for the regulation of our conduct in the service of Christ. Even now they are working the formidable apparatus of civil compulsion, that they may enslave our consciences, in this spiritual matter, to themselves; and they denounce us as anarchists and rebels for asking them to let us alone, and to leave our consciences free to be governed by the Word. Another

question is as to the powers which necessarily and inherently belong to the pastoral office. Can there be any question more strictly or peculiarly spiritual, or which more manifestly falls to be determined by Christ's Churches according to the Scriptures? The pastoral office is not man's institution. The magistrate did not create it—cannot convey it. It is the institution of Christ; its nature and its powers can only be ascertained on a reference to his laws. Yet have our civil courts given forth their judgment upon it; in the case of from two to three hundred of our pastors, they have shorn it of one half of its divinely instituted powers, and declared that the key of discipline and government does not belong to it; and they are forcing upon us the adoption of their views, while our consciences regard them as unscriptural and at variance with the appointment of Christ.

Such, my fathers and brethren, is the pass to which things have come. Our liberty to hear Christ is at an end within the pale of the Establishment. Our liberty, however, we must have. We prefer no claim as infallible interpreters of the will of our Master. But neither are they who coerce us infallible. And a sacred duty has been imposed upon us—the duty of hearing Christ for ourselves, as he speaks from the Word. That duty must be discharged. And we do demand and insist that, both as individuals, and as a Church, the *liberty* of discharging it be allowed. If Christ's voice can now be heard only beyond the pale of the Establishment, within which we have hitherto sojourned, we shall go forth unto Christ, without this camp, bearing his reproach.

We conclude by repeating the propositions, of which the argument of this discourse embodies, we trust, a sufficient demonstration. We conclude by repeating them, in the hope that they may be found a convenient formula

for the exhibition of “the present truth”—that truth which is now the special object of the world’s hostility—around which, therefore, the liege subjects of Christ’s crown ought everywhere to be rallying—and to which the most emphatic and self-denying testimony of the ministers of Christ is due.

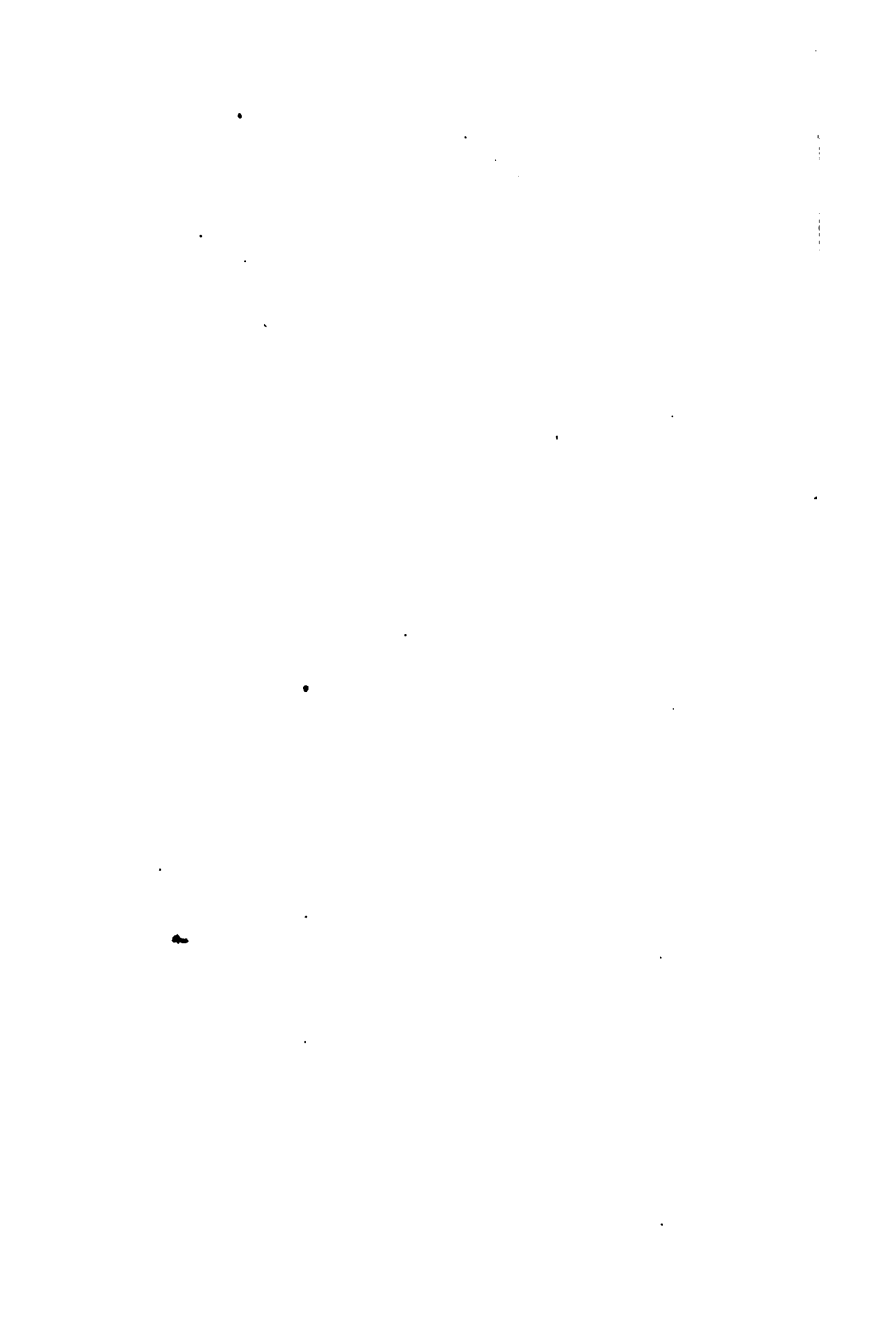
EVERY CHURCH OF CHRIST IS BOUND, BY THE LAW OF ITS EXISTENCE, AT ALL TIMES, UNDER ALL CIRCUMSTANCES, AND IN ITS WHOLE PROCEDURE AND ADMINISTRATION, TO HEAR AND OBEY CHRIST’S VOICE FROM THE SCRIPTURES :—AND NEITHER THE STATE, NOR ANY OTHER PARTY, BE IT POPE, BISHOP, COUNCIL, FATHERS, OR REFORMERS, HAS A RIGHT, OR CAN, WHETHER BY PURCHASE, BY COMPACT, OR IN ANY OTHER WAY, ACQUIRE A RIGHT, TO COME BETWEEN THE CONSCIENCE OF ANY CHURCH OF CHRIST, AND THE MIND OF CHRIST AS PRESENTLY ASCERTAINED BY THAT CHURCH FOR ITSELF FROM THE WORD OF GOD.

THE END.

ERRATUM.

Page 27, first line, *for* "must" *read* "cannot."





1

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